



Seminar series “Culture & Technology”

Seminar II Technology beyond “reality”

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Nietzsche, who by the way was one of the first philosophers to use a (very primitive) typewriter, said that the problem of today man is to rise to the level of his technical capabilities.

This is more and more the case in the late modern society, where the main temptation of intellectuals, artists, philosophers, has always been that of refusing technology as a form of dehumanization.

This view was motivated by the emphasis put on the mechanical model – the engine – which appeared to be the very image of technology; in which any freedom disappears because the periphery is supposed to be moved by the centre in a relation of pure subjection. The invention of electronic technology, and the enormous expansion of internet, but already the various forms of bidirectional tools (telephone, above all), need a different point of view.

Philosophers like Heidegger or Derrida, in different ways, have shown that being is not identical with being-present; on the contrary, emphasis on presence risks always to constitute a form of submission to the existing (also social and political) orders. In many senses, this de-valuation of the presence is the (sole) possible philosophical background of today’s communication world. What counts is not the physical presence in a particular time-space context, but the freedom with which, especially in the virtual reality, we may move beyond the boundaries of our every day contexts. I am thinking of the “ludic” (playful) uses of some very sophisticated virtual-reality technology: e.g. the creation of joyful, even erotic, experiences, through the same means the military uses to train space pilots. All this involves of course a transformation of the very meaning of “reality” itself, because it makes less and less sense to object that virtual reality is “just” virtual. To take an example in economy, it is well known that hopes and expectations, in the stock market, create exactly the effects they are counting upon.

The same Nietzsche I cited above wrote also, in one of his late unpublished notes, that “there are no facts, only interpretations. And this too is an interpretation...” What we are facing with in the world of electronic communication is a deep and unprecedented transformation of the very “principle of reality”. Following Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, also the neo-pragmatism which has taken the place of neopositivism in the anglo-saxon philosophy, we shall not regret the “lost true reality”, engaging on the contrary in the search for a more human – i.e. more intersubjective – way of viewing the world.

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